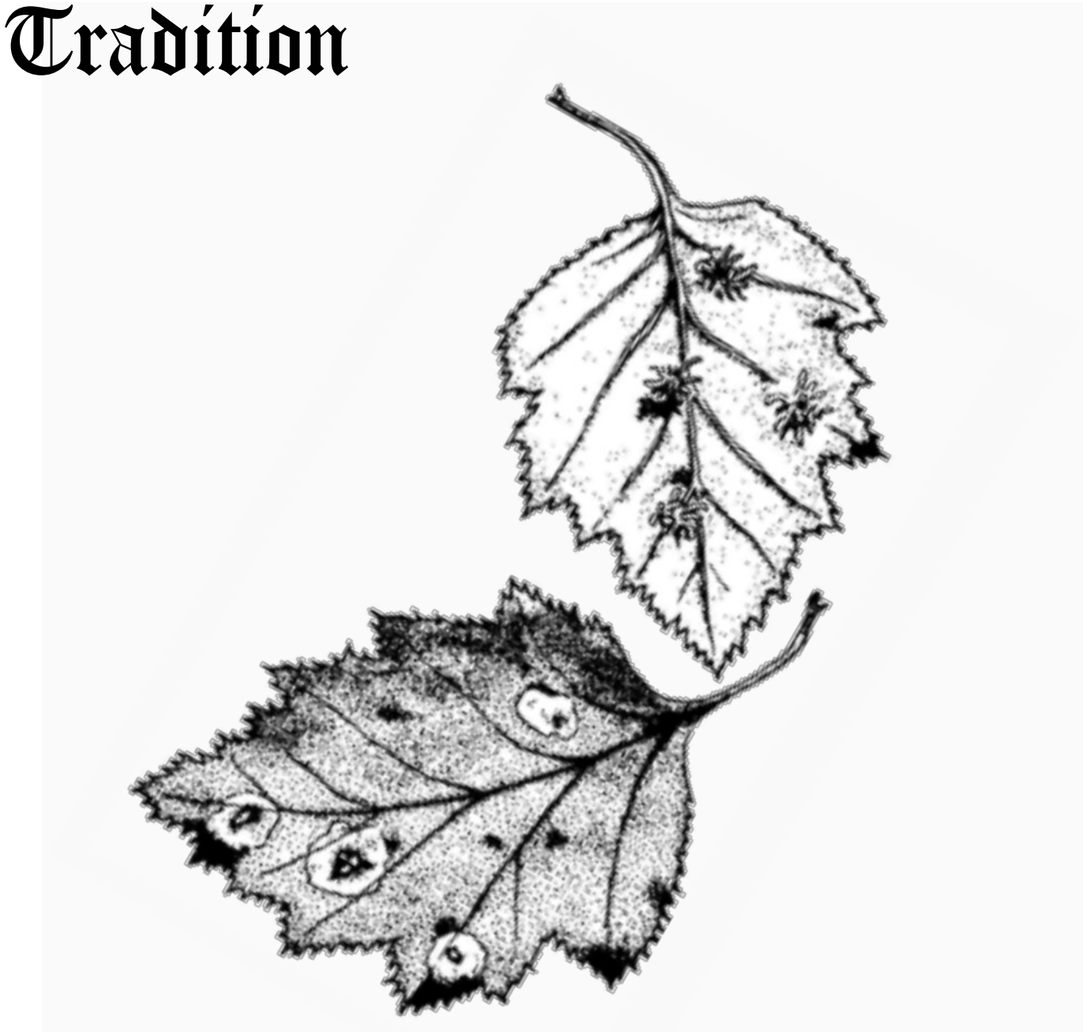
Bridging the Unbridgeable Chasm: On Bookchin's Critique of the Anarchist Tradition



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One of Murray Bookchin's best-known works is *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm.*[1] In it, he argues that two quite distinct and incompatible currents have traversed the entire history of anarchism. He labels these two divergent tendencies "social anarchism" and "lifestyle anarchism," and contends that between them "there exists a divide that cannot be bridged."

The idea that there is an "unbridgeable chasm" between two viewpoints that share certain common presuppositions and goals, and whose practices are in some ways interrelated, is a bit suspect from the outset. It is particularly problematic when proposed by a thinker like Bookchin, who claims to hold a dialectical perspective. Whereas nondialectical thought merely opposes one reality to another in an abstract manner, or else places them inertly beside one another, a dialectical analysis examines the ways in which various realities presuppose one another, constitute one another, challenge the identity of one another, and push one another to the limits of their development. Accordingly, one important quality of such an analysis is that it helps those with divergent viewpoints see the ways in which their positions are not mutually exclusive but can instead be mutually realized in a further development of each.

Nevertheless, Bookchin contends that there is an absolute abyss between two tendencies within contemporary anarchism. One is what he depicts as an individualist and escapist current that he sees as increasingly dominating the movement, while the other is a communally oriented and socially engaged form of anarchism, which he sees as in a process of continual retreat. Bookchin argues that this stark dichotomy has its roots in the history of anarchism, and that certain flaws in the very mainstream of historical anarchism have contributed to the ways in which the contemporary movement has gone astray. He presents his "unbridgeable chasm" thesis as follows: "Stated bluntly: Between the socialist pedigree of anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism (which have never denied the importance of self-realization and the fulfillment of desire), and the basically liberal, individualistic pedigree of lifestyle anarchism (which fosters social ineffectuality, if not outright social negation), there exists a divide that cannot be bridged unless we completely disregard the profoundly different goals, methods, and underlying philosophy that distinguish them."

It will be argued here that this analysis is based on a fallacious reading of the history of anarchism. It will be shown that the anarchist tradition has been investigating the dialectic between the individual and social dimensions of freedom with considerable seriousness throughout its history. An apt depiction of the anarchist view of the relation between the personal and social dimensions is found in Alan Ritter's concept of "communal individuality." Ritter, a careful student of classical anarchist thought, explains that in espousing communal individuality, the anarchist tradition asserts that personal autonomy and social solidarity, rather than opposing one another, are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. He sees the theoretical defense of this synthesis to be "the strength of the anarchists'

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1 Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (San Francisco and Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995). Subsequent quotes from this work will not be cited in the text. Citations here from that work can be found online in the Anarchy Archives at dwardmac.pitzer.edu. Citations of his other works will refer to the published print versions. I would like to express my appreciation to David Watson, Ronald Creagh, Spencer Sunshine, Peter Marshall, and Mark Lance for their very helpful suggestions, which improved this text considerably.

thought."[2] One might add that one of the great achievements of anarchist practice has been the actualization of this theoretical synthesis in various social forms, including personal relationships, affinity groups, intentional communities, cooperative projects, and movements for revolutionary social transformation. In the analysis that follows, Bookchin's critique of the record of anarchism in these areas will be assessed.[3]

One can find in Bookchin's "Lifestyle Anarchism" article the seeds of his later break with anarchism. For in it he indicts not only the supposed "lifestyle" tendency but the anarchist tradition in general for a failure to reconcile what he calls "autonomy" and "freedom." At the beginning of Unbridgeable Chasm he claims that "For some two centuries, anarchism — a very ecumenical body of anti-authoritarian ideas — developed in the tension between two basically contradictory tendencies: a personalistic commitment to individual autonomy and a collectivist commitment to social freedom."

Despite the centrality of this claim to his critique, Bookchin never produces significant evidence that what anarchists have historically and in recent times defended as "personal autonomy" and "social freedom" are "basically contradictory." To do so would have required him to take one of two approaches. First, he could discuss the history of these two concepts as they are expressed by various thinkers and organizations in the tradition and show that they are contradictory conceptually. He does not, however, do this. Second, he could survey anarchist practice and demonstrate that the application of these two concepts in practice has led inevitably to contradictory results. He also fails to do this.

Conversely, the invalidity of Bookchin's claims could be demonstrated in two ways. First, one or more cases in which anarchists have developed concepts of individual autonomy and social freedom that are clearly non-contradictory could be presented. Second, one or more cases could be cited in which concepts of individual autonomy and social freedom have been applied in practice in complementary, noncontradictory ways. In the following discussion, Bookchin's contentions will be refuted in both of these ways; however, a mere refutation of Bookchin's claims would not do justice to the achievements of anarchism. I will therefore seek to show that not only can we find those "one or more cases," that minimally refute Bookchin, but also that there has been and still is today a rich and highly developed anarchist tradition that synthesizes the personal and social dimensions of freedom, rather than opposing them to one another.

Individual and Society in Anarchist Thought

According to Bookchin "anarchism's failure to resolve [the] tension [between individual autonomy and social freedom], to articulate the relationship of the individual to the collective, and to enunciate the historical circumstances that would make possible a stateless anarchic society produced problems in anarchist thought that remain unresolved to this day." It would indeed be absurd to state that anarchist theory has entirely "resolved the tension" between the personal and social dimensions. In fact, only a nondialectical, abstractly idealist approach could anticipate the dissolution of this tension in real history

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2 Alan Ritter, *Anarchism: A Theoretical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 3.

3 This discussion will not cover Bookchin's extensive claims in Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism concerning neoprimitivist and antitechnological tendencies in contemporary anarchism. These claims have been analyzed very carefully and refuted quite devastatingly in David Watson's chapters "Dreams of Reason and Unbridgeable Chasms" and "Social Ecology and Its Discontents" in *Beyond Bookchin: Preface to a Future Social Ecology* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia: 1996), 189–248.

that they had a deeper basis for affinity in common values and sensibilities. In addition, some groups have grown out of years of common political work and existing longterm personal relationships. Some groups remain together only for the duration of a particular action or project, but others become permanent associations in which the members consciously plan their collective futures. Dupuis-Déri notes that despite these differences in level of affinity and ongoing commitment to the group, the members of most groups accept the further development of affinity as a goal to pursue within the group and recognize that the group functions more effectively to the degree that it is attained.[53]

A crucial issue is whether affinity groups and other small communities of liberation can spread throughout all levels of society, moving beyond their present marginality without losing their radicality. Can they expand their scope, so that while they may remain in part a manifestation of oppositional youth culture, they will also become a more generalized expression of the striving for a new just, ecological society? Can they successfully incorporate a diversity of age groups, ethnicities and class backgrounds? It is not possible to investigate these issues here, but research on small primary communities (including affinity groups, base communities, small intentional communities and cooperatives) provides evidence that they have the potential to play a significant liberatory role in society today.[54]

The extent to which this potential will be realized remains to be seen; however, it is clear that the contemporary anarchist movement has already made important contributions to this developing experiment in communal individuality. I have focused here on anarchist participation in the global justice movement; however, my close observation of the recovery effort over the past two years since Hurricane Katrina has led me to conclusions similar to those of Dupuis-Déri. Among the volunteers there have been many hundreds, and perhaps thousands, committed to or influenced by anarchism. I have met many of them and worked closely with some. Though most have qualities that Bookchin associates with the lifestyle anarchism that he vilifies, what has struck me most about them and moved me deeply is their commitment to solidarity and mutual aid and their love and respect for the people and communities they serve. The values and work of many anarchist volunteers is documented extensively in the thousands of documents in Francesco di Santis's "Post-Katrina Portraits" project, which in part "celebrates those who came from afar in solidarity with the self-determination of [the gulf region's] peoples."[55] Bookchin's thesis that there is an "unbridgeable chasm" between forms of anarchism that stress individuality and those that stress social solidarity is refuted by the history of both anarchist theory and anarchist practice. The bridge is crossed many times each day by those who practice the anarchist ideal of communal individuality in their everyday lives.

53 Dupuis-Déri, "Manifestations," 5–6.

54 I discuss at some length the potential for small communities of liberation in "The Microecology of Community" in *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 60 (2004), 169–179, and "The Problem of Political Culture," in *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 57 (2004), 103–108.

55 Over a thirteen-month period di Santis drew several thousand portraits on which survivors and volunteers recorded their personal stories. Hundreds can be found online at www.postkatrinaportraits.org and many are collected in a beautifully produced volume entitled *The Post-Katrina Portraits, Written & Narrated by Hundreds,* Drawn by Francesco di Santis. The work of volunteers, including many anarchists, is also documented extensively in many recent films, including Danish director Rasmus Holm's *Welcome to New Orleans,* which can be found at video.google.com video.google.com and Farrah Hoffmire's *Falling Together in New Orleans: A Series of Vignettes,* available at www.organicprocess.com.

or propose a theory that aims at "resolving" it.[4] However, anarchist thought and practice have certainly made significant contributions to "articulating the relationship between the individual and the collective." As mentioned, Ritter in his study of classical anarchist theory shows that a conception of "communal individuality" runs through the tradition. What is striking when one looks at this tradition is its consistency in upholding the importance of both poles of the individual/social polarity. Emma Goldman is particularly notable for her incomparable manner of affirming both solidarity and individuality, but many major anarchist thinkers, including those considered the most archetypal social anarchists, have maintained a very strong commitment to personal freedom and what Bookchin calls "autonomy."[5]

William Godwin, who is often called "the father of philosophical anarchism," believed firmly that a free and just society must be based on the maximum liberty for each individual. Central to Godwin's entire political philosophy and ethics was what he called "the right of private judgment."[6]This right was based on the concept that each person's decisions on matters of crucial moral and practical importance should be guided to the greatest possible degree by his or her own reason and judgment, and that neither coercion nor social pressure should interfere with the exercise of this right. Godwin's carefully argued position constitutes one of the most extreme defenses of a kind of individual autonomy in the history of political theory. Nevertheless, he also held that the individual's judgment should in all cases be directed toward the greatest good for all of society. Indeed, he contended that one has no right to make personal use of anything that one happens to possess if it could create more good by being devoted to some larger social purpose. For Godwin, individual freedom and personal autonomy are intimately connected to social freedom and the common good. The affirmation of such an interrelationship pervades the mainstream of classical anarchist thought since Godwin and achieves a much higher level of development in the work of later thinkers.

Mikhail Bakunin, perhaps the best known of all anarchist theorists, is a paradigm case of a social anarchist who stresses both dimensions. While Bookchin claims that "Bakunin emphatically prioritized the social over the individual," in reality, one of Bakunin's central theses is that one does not ordinarily have to do such prioritizing because the welfare of society and the self-realization of the individual person are complementary rather than in conflict. In one of Bakunin's best-known passages he addresses the compatibility between individual and social freedom. He says that the liberty that he defends is

> the only liberty worthy of the name, the liberty which implies the full development of all the material, intellectual, and moral capacities latent in every one of us; the liberty which knows no other restrictions but those set by the laws of our own nature. Consequently there are, properly speaking, no restrictions, since these laws are not imposed upon us by any legislator from outside, alongside, or above ourselves. These laws are subjective, inherent in ourselves; they constitute the very basis of our being. Instead of seeking to curtail them,

4 In fact, one weakness of some anarchist theories, and certainly of Bookchin's own thought, is the tendency to exaggerate the degree to which this tension could be largely dissolved if certain institutional changes were introduced.

5 An excellent statement of Goldman's position is found in her essay "The Individual, Society and the State," in Alix Kates Shulman, ed., *Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings & Speeches* by Emma Goldman (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 86–106.

6 See John P. Clark, *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 134–147.

> we should see in them the real condition and the effective cause of our liberty — that liberty of each man which does not find another man's freedom a boundary but a confirmation and vast extension of his own; liberty through solidarity, in equality.[7]

Unfortunately, Bookchin completely ignores passages such as this one that conflict with the idea of "prioritizing." On the other hand, he cites the following statement by Bakunin on behalf of his position:

> Society antedates and at the same time survives every human individual, being in this respect like Nature itself. It is eternal like Nature, or rather, having been born upon our earth, it will last as long as the earth. A radical revolt against society would therefore be just as impossible for man as a revolt against Nature, human society being nothing else but the last great manifestation or creation of Nature upon this earth. And an individual who would want to rebel against society ... would place himself beyond the pale of real existence.

One must wonder how carefully Bookchin read this passage before citing it, because it does not in fact support his view. Bakunin's point here is that any idea of revolting against society is an illusion; however the concept that one cannot revolt against society does not imply the view that society should be "prioritized over the individual." Using Bookchin's fallacious method of reading this passage, one would be compelled to conclude that Bakunin also believed that nature should be "prioritized over the individual," since he says that we also cannot revolt against nature. But he did not hold such a position. The actual point of the passage is to lend support to Bakunin's general argument that the good of the individual and the social good, rather than conflicting, are compatible with one another. From such a perspective, the prioritization problematic adopted by both extreme individualists (who prioritize the individual) and authoritarians (who prioritize society) involves a false dilemma.

Elisée Reclus also affirmed the inseparable unity between personal and social freedom. He presents a very detailed defense of individual freedom in areas of speech, conduct, association, and many other areas, but always in the context of growing communal ties based on mutual aid and social cooperation. In an early statement he affirms that "for each individual man liberty is an end," but at the same time "it is only a means toward love and universal brotherhood."[8] Throughout his writings, he consistently stresses the theme that anarchism strives for a society based on both freedom and solidarity. Like Bakunin, Reclus rejects versions of socialism that "prioritize" the collective over the individual, rather than affirming both. He attacks "some communist varieties" that "in reaction against the present-day society, seem to believe that men ought to dissolve themselves into the mass and become nothing more than the innumerable arms of an octopus" or "drops of water lost in the sea."[9] He launches an extensive critique of authoritarian socialism based precisely on its failure to recognize the freedom and autonomy of each person. Reclus asserts that the anarchist ideal "entails for each man the complete and absolute liberty to express his thoughts in every area, including science, politics, and morals, without any condition other than his respect for others. It also entails the right of each to do as he pleases while naturally joining his will with those of others in all collective endeavors. His own freedom is in no way limited by this union, but rather expands, thanks to the strength of the common will."[10] Throughout his

7 Michael Bakunin, "The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State" at dwardmac.pitzer.edu.
8 John Clark and Camille Martin, ed. and trans., *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: The Radical Social Thought of Elisée Reclus* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 50.
9 ibid., 53 — 54.
10 ibid., 158–159.

Members of the group "share a similar sensibility regarding their choice of causes to defend and promote, targets to prioritize, type of actions to carry out and the manner of doing so, the degree of risk they are willing to take, etc."[47] Observers note that there is typically a pervasive ethos of egalitarianism, antihierarchy, participation, and commitment to the good of the group. Dupuis-Déri stresses the fact that the highly participatory nature of the affinity group makes possible a much higher level of political reflection and deliberation than is typical of the hierarchical and putatively representative institutions that most associate with democracy.[48]

Whereas Bookchin attacks consensus as hyperindividualist and ineffectual, Dupuis-Déri shows that real-world affinity groups have explored consensus as a means of achieving both group solidarity and practical efficacy. According to his interviews, group members "feel that the primary affinitive or amical bond at the heart of their group more or less naturally implies a desire and will to seek consensus."[49] In his view, consensus is a purely anarchist form of decision-making, while majority rule compromises anarchist principles. "Anarchy is distinct from (direct) democracy in that decisions are made collectively by consensus in anarchy and by majority vote in democracy."[50] The widespread anarchist option for consensus is based on both principle and practicality. "Stories and personal accounts concerning affinity groups show that the participants generally prefer anarchy to direct democracy, both for moral reasons (democracy is perceived as synonymous with majority tyranny) and political ones (consensus promotes greater group cohesiveness, a spontaneous division of labor, and a feeling of security)."[51]

While Bookchin charges that current affinity group practice and consensus processes encourage self-absorption and quietism, Dupuis- Déri's research shows that affinity groups and other forms of microsocial organization have served to expand the public sphere and create a forum for participatory deliberation. He observes that "small-scale political communities — a squat, an activist group, a crowd of demonstrators, and an affinity group — provide political spaces where decisionmaking processes can be egalitarian and can function by means of deliberative assemblies, in which a meeting room, an auditorium, or even a street occupied by demonstrators may serve as the agora."[52] The import of Dupuis-Déri's findings is that the contemporary anarchist movement has been engaged in an important experiment in the libertarian tradition of communal individuality. It is an endeavor to unite a politics of direct action, inspired by a sense of social justice and solidarity, with a practice of participatory, egalitarian community based on love and respect for each person.

It must be conceded that to this point most affinity groups in the global justice movement have not been based on "affinity" in its strongest sense, since they are formed by participants who usually had no personal ties prior to joining together for a particular protest or political action. Nevertheless, many groups have been formed by activists who converged for a specific political action and then discovered

47 ibid.
48 For a detailed discussion of participatory deliberation (including the use of consensus) in affinity groups and in direct action movements, see Dupuis-Déri's "Global protesters versus global elites," forthcoming in *New Political Science.*
49 Dupuis-Déri, "L'altermondialisation."
50 ibid.
51 Dupuis-Déri, "Manifestations," 6. The idea expressed here that democracy is necessarily a form of tyranny is an example of the hyperbole used by some advocates of consensus, and is in a way the mirror image of Bookchin's view that consensus is never more than "the tyranny of structurelessness."
52 Dupuis-Déri, "L'altermondialisation."

scientist Francis Dupuis-Déri has studied affinity groups and other forms of anarchist organization during many years of experience as a participant observer in the global justice movement.[41] Dupuis-Déri shows that one reason why the global justice movement has grown rapidly is that it has created "in the shadow of the black flag" (as he phrases it) a strong radical political culture, a growing system of counterinstitutions in which this culture is expressed, and small group structures in which members can begin to transform their own relationships in accord with the ideals of the movement. Members have initiated a spectrum of projects fitting into many of the forms of liberatory social expression just mentioned. According to the News from Nowhere group, these diverse activities "form a self-organized matrix dedicated to the construction of alternative social relationships."[42]

Central to the development of this "matrix" is the most basic self-organization on the molecular level, in the form of the affinity groups that are perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the movement. The affinity group as a specific organizational form had its origin in the Spanish anarchist movement; however, it is part of a long tradition that includes various small religious communities (especially those of radical and dissident sects), numerous experiments in small intentional communities, and the political "circles" of the nineteenth century. The affinity group structure was revived in the antinuclear movement of the 1960s and 70s. It has played a part in other recent social movements including feminism, gay liberation, and the ecology movement, and has achieved its greatest recent flourishing in the global justice movement. In the nineteenth century, Reclus stressed the centrality of such small groups to the process of liberatory social transformation. Dupuis-Déri cites anarchist writer and pedagogue Sébastien Faure's statement that affinity is "the only principle that is in keeping with the spirit of anarchism, since it threatens neither the aspirations, the character, nor the freedom of anyone,"[43] and adds that the affinity group might thus serve as the basic unit of an anarchist organization or society.[44]

According to Dupuis-Déri the affinity group structure has been adopted widely in current anarchist and anarchist-influenced movements in the form of "an autonomous activist unit created by between five and twenty people on the basis of a common affinity with the goal of carrying out political actions together." Such groups have their basis in "friendship" (amitié) which implies "reciprocity and common interests, indeed common activities that friends engage in and which maintain and reinforce the bond of friendship."[45] The members "decide among themselves the criteria for inclusion in or exclusion from their group" and its "creation and functioning" is "to a large degree determined by ties of friendship."[46] Each group is "autonomous" in the sense that it is not under the direction of any larger organization, but is rather directed according to the interests and commitments of the members.

41 Some of Dupuis-Déri's extensive research is found in *Les Black Blocs: La liberté et l'égalité se manifestent* (Lyon: Atelier de Création Libertaire, 2005).
42 Notes From Nowhere, ed., *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2003).
43 Francis Dupuis-Déri, "L'altermondialisation à l'ombre du drapeau noir: L'anarchie en héritage" in Eric Agrikoliansky, Olivier Fillieule, and Nonna Mayer, eds., *L'altermondialisme en France: La longue histoire d'une nouvelle cause* (Paris, Flammarion, 2005). My translation.
44 ibid.
45 Francis Dupuis-Déri, "Manifestations altermondialisation et 'groupes d'affinité': Anarchisme et psychologie des foules rationnelles." Presented at a conference on "Les mobilisations altermondialistes," December 3–5, 2003, available at www.afsp.mshparis.fr, p. 3. My translation.
46 ibid.

works Reclus argues consistently that community and solidarity can never be separated from liberty and individuality.

Kropotkin had similar views. For example, he states quite specifically that communism is not only compatible with individualism, but is in fact the foundation for the only authentic form of individualism. "Communism," he says, "is the best basis for individual development and freedom; not that individualism which drives man to the war of each against all — this is the only one known up till now — but that which represents the full expansion of man's faculties, the superior development of what is original in him, the greatest fruitfulness of intelligence, feeling and will."[11] In another passage in which he expresses similar ideas it is noteworthy that in doing so he invokes the value of individual autonomy. According to Kropotkin, "free workers would require a free organization, and this cannot have any other basis than free agreement and free cooperation, without sacrificing the autonomy of the individual to the all-pervading interference of the State."[12]Individual autonomy, in the context of free social cooperation is thus an essential value in the view of this great anarchist philosopher.

The Political Discourse of Freedom and Autonomy

Bookchin claims, however, that an opposition between personal autonomy and social freedom has plagued the entire anarchist tradition. He contends that individualists and lifestyle anarchists in particular "call for autonomy rather than freedom," and that as a result they "forfeit the rich social connotations of freedom." This is not, according to Bookchin, a marginal phenomenon limited to extreme individualists. Rather, he claims, there is a "steady anarchist drumbeat for autonomy rather than social freedom" and this "cannot be dismissed as accidental, particularly in Anglo-American varieties of libertarian thought, where the notion of autonomy more closely corresponds to personal liberty." He contends, moreover, that the "roots" of what he sees as the insidious concept of autonomy "lie in the Roman imperial tradition of libertas, wherein the untrammeled ego is 'free' to own his personal property — and to gratify his personal lusts. Today, the individual endowed with 'sovereign rights' is seen by many lifestyle anarchists as antithetical not only to the State but to society as such."

Bookchin's discussion of autonomy and freedom is fundamentally flawed since he ignores the fact that actual usage simply does not correspond to his fanciful account. He holds that "while autonomy is associated with the presumably self-sovereign individual, freedom dialectically interweaves the individual with the collective." Neither claim is correct. The term "autonomy" does not by definition imply a sovereign ego and is quite often used by the proponent in ways that explicitly reject an egoistic standpoint. Conversely, the term "freedom" is not necessarily related to any sort of "dialectical interweaving" and is very often used in senses that contradict such a conception. The right wing, for example, incessantly stresses its commitment to a "freedom" that has no such connotations.

Though many anarchists historically have used the term "autonomy," there has certainly been among them no "steady drumbeat" in which "social freedom" is rejected as contrary to "autonomy." Contemporary anarchists also do not often engage in this particular kind of tub-thumping. Rather, they usually consider the two concepts to be complementary and indeed inseparable. A great many collectivist, syndicalist, and communist anarchists have used the term in a sense that is entirely

11 Peter Kropotkin, "Anarchism: Its Philosophy and ldeal" at dwardmac.pitzer.edu.
12 Peter Kropotkin, "Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles" at dwardmac.pitzer.edu.

compatible with their conception of social freedom. The Spanish sections of the First International in a statement in 1882 stated that “In our organization, we already practice the anarchist principle, the most graphic expression of Freedom and Autonomy.”[13] Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were at one point members of a group called “Autonomy.” A quotation that is found frequently on anarchist websites is communist anarchist Luigi Galleani’s definition of anarchism as “the autonomy of the individual within the freedom of association.”[14]

One of the most prominent usages of the term “autonomy” in the last few decades has been its reference to “autonomist Marxism,” a direct actionist, decentralist tendency that emerged in Italy in the 1960s and has had a significant influence since. It is also associated closely with the thought of Cornelius Castoriadis, who was one of the most important and sophisticated left theorists of the last century, and was noted for his support for decentralism, self-management, and antistatism. It has also been used by the “Autonomes” in France, activists who were influenced by Socialism or Barbarism and other anti-authoritarian tendencies, and who have been important in grassroots struggles on behalf of the unemployed and immigrants and in the global justice movement. Finally, it has been used by the German “Autonomen,” who were strongly influenced by anarcho-communist ideas and have been known for militant direct actionist tactics. In all of these instances, the term has been associated with socially engaged, anticapitalist, anti-authoritarian movements that have rejected the strategy and practice of vanguard parties and left-wing unions and have advocated direct action, wildcat strikes and other diverse forms of militant social struggle. Thus, the term has an extensive history in recent political movements on the left, and its widespread usage in this connection has nothing to do with untrammeled egos, personal lusts, or the Roman Empire.

Bookchin’s linguistic usage in this case is an unusually excellent example of what philosophers call “Humpty Dumpty Language.” As that character says in *Alice in Wonderland*, “When I use a word ... it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.” While this strategy may have been appropriate in Wonderland, in rational discourse it is essential to consider what a word means for the language community in which it is used. In cases in which a person’s usage is to be used to determine what that person thinks, the crucial point to consider is obviously what that person intends by such usage, not what one would like it to mean.

A closely related element of Bookchin’s critique of anarchist views of freedom is his contention that “essentially ... anarchism as a whole advanced what Isaiah Berlin has called ‘negative freedom,’ that is to say, a formal ‘freedom from,’ rather than a substantive ‘freedom to.’” It would be quite significant if Bookchin could substantiate this charge, since anarchist theorists have argued that one of the great strengths of the anarchist position is that it offers a more comprehensive and inclusive conception of freedom than the one-sidedly negative conception of freedom in classical liberalism, neoliberalism, and right-wing libertarianism, and the one-sidedly positive conception of freedom in welfare statism and various authoritarianisms of right and left. Anarchism can justly claim that it has to a greater degree than any other political theory strongly affirmed both the negative and positive aspects of freedom.

13 Quoted in Robert Graham, ed., *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume 1: From Anarchy to Anarchism* (300CE-1939) (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 125.

14 Quoted, for example, in the Anarchist FAQ at fractalus.org.

commitment to seeking consensus is on the other hand based on a realistic recognition that conformism, instrumentalist thinking, and power-seeking behavior are everpresent dangers in all decision-making bodies.

Finally, Bookchin claims that consensus decision-making inevitably fails. “If anything,” he remarks, “functioning on the basis of consensus assures that important decision-making will be either manipulated by a minority or collapse completely.” This conclusion amounts to no more than a hasty generalization based on very little evidence concerning groups actually using it (for example, Bookchin’s personal recollections of the Clamshell Alliance almost twenty years earlier). If one wishes to assess accurately the practice of the contemporary anarchist movement, it is necessary to look at empirical studies and careful documentation of this practice.

The Role of Affinity Groups and Primary Communities

Bookchin’s attack on contemporary anarchist practice is based in large part on a basic assumption about the nature of society. He contends that it is the municipality that is “the living cell which forms the basic unit of political life ... from which everything else must emerge: confederation, interdependence, citizenship, and freedom.”[39] He also claims that “like it or not” the city is “the most immediate environment which we encounter and with which we are obliged to deal, beyond the sphere of family and friends, in order to satisfy our needs as social beings.”[40] In reality, however, there is no one privileged “basic unit of political life,” and to seek one results in a very nondialectical reduction of the political problematic. Furthermore, there are in fact many overlapping natural and social environments “with which we are obliged to deal,” all of which are mediated in many ways. The city or municipality is neither the “most immediate” social environment nor “the living cell” on which all else depends.

A dialectical approach recognizes that deeply transformative social change must take place at many levels simultaneously. I would argue that this implies economic alternatives such as worker cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, labor-exchange systems, land trusts, cooperative housing, and other noncapitalist initiatives — in short, an emerging solidarity economy. It implies neighborhood and local radical, direct actionist political organization (including a movement for strong town and neighborhood assemblies) that helps generate a radical democratic grassroots politics. It implies the creation of cooperative, democratic media, including strong dissident and community-based radio, television and print media. It implies the creation of local institutions such as bookstores, cafes and community centers for the nurturing of liberatory art, music, poetry, theater, and other forms of cultural expression. It implies the flourishing of cooperative households, small intentional communities and affinity groups. None of these activities should be dismissed a priori as forms of self-indulgence or as tangential or contradictory to some single privileged political strategy.

It is in fact in many of these areas that a large part of grassroots anarchist activism is taking place today. While Bookchin bases his stereotypes of contemporary anarchism at best on impressionistic observations, others have engaged in careful research on the movement and its practice. Political

39 Murray Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1987), 282.

40 Murray Bookchin, *Remaking Society* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1989), 183.

In Bookchin's view, the advocate of consensus, by "denigrating rational, discursive, and direct-democratic procedures for collective decision-making as 'dictating' and 'ruling' awards a minority of one sovereign ego the right to abort the decision of a majority." There are a series of false assumptions in this short statement. It is simply not true that support for consensus implies that one opts for irrationality. Both consensus and majority-rule are rational decision-making processes that can be debated coherently. On the other hand, the failure to recognize that the imposition of the will of a majority on a minority (whether justified or not) is a form of "ruling" indicates either confusion or bad faith. Furthermore, Bookchin fails to grasp the fact that even if one supports the institution of democratic decision-making,one can still uphold the principle that one must ultimately follow one's own conscience and in some cases disobey the majority. Such recognition of the need to follow ones conscience does not imply an appeal to some "sovereign ego." Far from appealing to egoism, advocates of consensus usually base it on respect for persons and the belief that consensus leads to more cooperative relationships and a more authentic and developed expression of the group's judgment and values. In the real world, an anarchist who finds it necessary to reject the will of the majority is much more likely to base that rejection on the good of the community than on the sovereignty of the ego.

Bookchin also argues that consensus decision-making "precludes ongoing dissensus — the all-important process of continual dialogue, disagreement, challenge, and counterchallenge, without which social as well as individual creativity would be impossible"; however, in reality there is nothing inherent in consensus that must preclude these things, and there is something inherent in it that encourages them. If consensus is to be reached by finding an alternative that is acceptable to all, it will sometimes be necessary to continue dialogue when it might have been cut off by majority vote. Furthermore, the fact that a consensus decision is reached in no way implies that differences in outlook will completely disappear from that point on, or that differences of opinion will be less likely to occur. Indeed, there is some reason to think that the respect for diversity inherent in consensus processes will in fact encourage and reinforce such multiplicity.

Bookchin's strong defense of majority rule as the privileged mode of decision-making and his dismissal of other possible processes reflect the fact that he is much less concerned than many anarchist theorists about the dangers of social pressure and conformist mechanisms within groups. His fear that people might decline into a "herd," a peril that he incongruously associates with individualism, seems to dissolve when he turns his attention to an institution like the municipal assembly.[38] The anarchist

38 It is impossible to analyze this complex issue in detail here; however, I find that both Bookchin and Biehl seriously neglect problems with majority rule in their most detailed discussions of the program of libertarian municipalism, for example Bookchin's "From Here to There," in *Remaking Society* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1989), 159–204, and Biehl's, *The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1999). Their typical modus operandi in such discussions is to gloss rather quickly over the problems with majoritarianism, to hastily dismiss opposing views as unworkable, and to invoke a future civic ethos as the ultimate solution to all problems. Thus, in "From Here to There," Bookchin expresses his hopes that the citizens of the libertarian municipality will, like the ancient Greeks, "learn civic responsibility, to reason out one's views with scrupulous care, to confront opposing arguments with clarity, and, hopefully, to advance tested principles that exhibited high ethical standards." (179) Biehl explains vaguely that the "paideia" that Bookchin depends on will be created "in the course of democratic political participation," "in the very process of decision-making," and in "the school of politics." (89) Not only is their version of "communal individuality" rather limited, the expectation that liberatory self-transformation can be effected overwhelmingly by one (currently nonexistent) institution seems wildly unrealistic. In short, there is far too much "there" and not nearly enough "here" in their analysis. For an extensive discussion of problems in Bookchin's *Libertarian Municipalism*, see my essay "Municipal Dreams: A Social Ecological Critique of Bookchin's Politics" in Andrew Light, ed., *Social Ecology After Bookchin* (New York: Guilford Publications, 1998), 137–190.

Anarchism's radical critique of force and coercion and its corresponding support for negative freedom are well known. Indeed, those who are unfamiliar with anarchist thought often identify anarchism with the mere belief in a voluntaristic society without coercive laws; however, one of the most striking aspects of anarchist thought is its very strong emphasis on the positive dimension of freedom. Bakunin is an excellent example. Though he emphasizes the threat to negative freedom posed by the coercive and repressive power of the state, his major focus is on the positive dimension. In a classic statement on this topic he says that freedom is "something very positive, very complex, and above all eminently social, since it can only be realized by society and only through the strictest equality and solidarity of each with all."[15]He contends that the first "moment or element" of this freedom is also "eminently positive and social: it is the full development and the full enjoyment by each person of all human faculties and capacities, by means of education, scientific instruction, and material prosperity, all of which are things that can only be provided to each through collective labor ... of the whole society."[16] He adds that there is also a "second element or moment of freedom" that is negative. It consists, he says, "of the revolt of the human individual against every authority, whether divine or human, collective or individual."[17] Interestingly, even Bakunin's "negative moment" of freedom does not correspond to what Berlin defined as "negative freedom," which, as important as it may be, nevertheless consists of the basically empty and indeterminate condition of merely being uncoerced. Even Bakunin's "negative" moment of freedom is actually an expression of positive freedom, since it entails action and striving and has determinate content.

Bakunin is far from alone in the anarchist tradition in espousing such a positive conception of freedom. With the exception of some individualist anarchists and anarcho-capitalists, anarchist theorists consistently give a positive dimension to freedom. In his exhaustive (over 750 page) survey of anarchist theory and practice, Peter Marshall concludes that while anarchists in general propose a considerable expansion of negative freedom, most also focus heavily on the positive conception, including freedom as the ability "to realize one's full potential."[18] He explicitly points out that a hostile critic, Marxist Paul Thomas, "errs in thinking that anarchists are chiefly concerned with a negative view of liberty."[19] It is rather surprising that Bookchin, even when he still considered himself to be an anarchist, could so badly distort the historical anarchist position in a similar manner. On the other hand, the fact that he could imagine that he had invented a position (a strong libertarian concept of positive freedom) that was highly developed for over a century and a half hints at how he could finally reject anarchism rather contemptuously (and ignorantly) as being theoretically inadequate.

Bookchin on Classical Individualist Anarchism

In order to depict a supposed absolute dichotomy between his two forms of anarchism, Bookchin is compelled to present a highly distorted picture of individualist anarchism. According to his account "as a credo, individualist anarchism remained largely a bohemian lifestyle, most conspicuous in its

15 Oeuvres (Paris: Stock, 1895), I: 313. My translation. This is from his vast, mostly unpublished text, The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution, in the section called "God and the State." This text should not be confused with another one that was somewhat confusingly published as a book under the same title.
16 ibid., 313–314.
17 ibid., 314.
18 Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 36.
19 ibid.

demands for sexual freedom (‘free love’) and enamored of innovations in art, behavior, and clothing,” and “most often ... expressed itself in culturally defiant behavior.” In other words, it existed in a form that would have made it an ideal precursor to what Bookchin depicts as the “lifestyle anarchism” of more recent times.

But this one-sided individualist anarchism, convenient as it may be for Bookchin’s argumentative strategy, exists much more in his imagination than in actual history. The classic American individualists — Josiah Warren, Lysander Spooner, Benjamin Tucker, and similar figures — simply do not fit into this mold.[20] One would never guess from his description that a figure like Tucker (the most important of the individualists) was concerned primarily with showing rent, profit and interest to be forms of economic exploitation and with formulating proposals for a just economy. Neither would they imagine that the great American individualist “looked upon anarchism as a branch of the general socialist movement.”[21] Ronald Creagh, author of the most comprehensive study of American anarchism, comments that “it is interesting to note that Josiah Warren and S. P. Andrews insisted on ‘the sovereignty of the individual’ but at the same time created the Modern Times community,” and “perhaps under Warren’s influence, one of the very first workers’ associations called themselves ‘sovereigns of industry.’”[22] Whether or not one agrees with their position, one must recognize that the individualist anarchists had highly developed ideas of social transformation and did not focus most of their energies on “Bohemianism.” In the end, American individualist anarchism fits very poorly into Bookchin’s model of lifestyle anarchism avant la lettre.

Moreover, much of the cultural radicalism that Bookchin depicts as typical only of individualist anarchism was in fact practiced widely by social anarchists also. Many communist and collectivist anarchists advocated “free love” and other forms of cultural nonconformity. For example, in the “Resolutions from the Zaragoza Congress of the CNT” (1936) one finds that “Libertarian communism proclaims free love regulated only by the wishes of the man and the woman.”[23] In addition, nudism, vegetarianism, and a kind of proto-ecologism spread within the Spanish anarchist movement, in part through the influence of communist anarchists such as Reclus, who harshly criticized authoritarian and bourgeois morality as repressive and hypocritical. Alan Antliff has done extensive and quite meticulous research that shows the ways in which anarchist avant garde artists have long been engaged in the project of social liberation.[24] And in the American libertarian communalist movement, one also finds the coexistence of anarcho-communist theory, support for revolutionary unionism, and cultural radicalism.[25]

20 The standard history of American individualist anarchism is James J. Martin’s *Men Against the State* (DeKalb, IL: Adrian Allen Associates, 1953; Colorado Springs, CO: Ralph Myles Publisher, 1970).

21 ibid., 226–227.

22 Personal correspondence. Creagh’s *Histoire de l’anarchisme aux États-Unis* (Grenoble: La Pensée sauvage, 1981) is based on his exhaustive 1164-page dissertation on American anarchism in the nineteenth century, *L’anarchisme aux États-Unis* (Paris: Didier Erudition, 1986).

23 recollectionbooks.com.

24 See Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), and *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007).

25 See Ronald Creagh, *Laboratoires de L’Utopie: Les Communautés Libertaires Aux Etats-Unis* (Paris: Payot, 1983), especially Ch. VIII, “Au-delà de l’Imaginaire,” pp. 183–197.

intentional communities do not merely sometimes go wrong, but “all” such projects are “occupied” by capitalist forces. Any freedom supposedly attained there is not real but merely “alleged.” This is Bookchin’s version of Margaret Thatcher’s “TINA” (There is No Alternative). For anarchists and left libertarians there is simply no alternative to his strategy of libertarian municipalism. We are to believe that this is so obvious that no real analysis of the empirical evidence of experiences in cooperatives, intentional communities, collectives, or affinity groups is necessary.

On Consensus as Disguised Egoism

An area in which Bookchin’s attacks on the contemporary anarchist movement is particularly harsh is its commitment to consensus decision-making. Bookchin has long been very hostile to this procedure, which he has attacked as a form of tyranny of the minority and a barrier to creating a viable movement for social change. In his view, consensus exaggerates the importance of personal self-actualization and group transformation at the expense of political effectiveness, and is a misguided assault on democracy itself.

In his arguments against consensus, Bookchin often assumes invalidly that it is incompatible with any acceptance of democratic decision-making. He also often concludes falsely that its advocates are extreme individualists and elitists. This is true of his attack on Susan Brown for her arguments for consensus and against the inherent right of the majority to make decisions, and more specifically for her agreement with Marshall that according to anarchist principles “the majority has no more right to dictate to the minority, even a minority of one, than the minority to the majority.”[37] Most anarchists who affirm this principle and advocate consensus as the ideal also recognize the need to use decentralized direct democracy to make decisions on some levels of organization, about certain matters, and in certain situations. What they reject is any absolute, inherent, or unconditional right of the majority to make decisions for the group. This position is based on a recognition of the fallibility of majorities and of the dangers of social pressure and conformist impulses. It is also an acknowledgment that majority rule is at best a necessary evil, and that even if it is accepted in some cases, it is always better to find more libertarian, voluntaristic means before resorting to less libertarian, more coercive ones.

Whether or not they have labeled the enforcement of the will of the majority as a form of “dictating,” anarchists have always been concerned about the inevitable possibility that majority decisions might conflict with deeply held values of some group members. Most have stressed the importance of recognizing and indeed nurturing what Godwin called “the right of private judgment.” This is why the anarchist tradition (contra Bookchin) has placed so much emphasis on the right of secession. For most anarchists, this is also not an absolute, inherent or unconditional right. Nevertheless, anarchist groups and communities often try to build into their structures provisions for dissenting members to opt out of particular policies and activities to which they have strong principled objections. As voluntary associations, and unlike states, they accord members who wish to end their association the greatest practically possible opportunity to disassociate without penalty. For similar reasons, anarchist groups and communities seek the greatest possible consensus decision-making (or when truly possible, consensual cooperation without formal decision-making) before resorting to majoritarian democracy.

37 Susan Brown, *The Politics of Individualism* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1993), 140.

on any public sphere anywhere. Thus, history has passed judgment on his claims about contemporary anarchism's lack of potential for entry into what we now see to be a revitalized arena of global politics.

But what of his most distinctive contentions concerning the attributes of this contemporary anarchism? Has the anarchist movement in general ("what passes for anarchism") in fact "denigrated" social commitment? Have anarchist collectives and affinity groups functioned primarily as "encounter groups"?[35] Have anarchists tended to reject structure, organization and public engagement? It obviously cannot be denied that the phenomena that Bookchin decries can be found within the anarchist movement today. Indeed, tendencies toward excessive individualism, adventurism, and detachment from social reality have always been present within anarchism and have been addressed by members and groups within the movement. Well over a century ago, Reclus pointed out how some anarchists who initiate noble cooperative economic projects often become insulated in their small world: "One tells oneself that it is especially important to succeed in an undertaking that involves the collective honor of a great number of friends, and one gradually allows oneself to be drawn into the petty practices of conventional business. The person who had resolved to change the world has changed into nothing more than a simple grocer."[36] Yet it would have been absurd for anyone in Reclus' day to conclude that because of such tendencies the entire anarchist movement was turning into an association of simple grocers.

It is clear that the anarchist movement today also faces enormous challenges in its project of developing truly liberatory social forms, and many of those challenges are internal to the movement. Those who focus one-sidedly on the personal dimension or on their own small projects must be encouraged to think through the larger social and political dimensions and preconditions of what they value most in their own lives and endeavors. Correspondingly, those who overemphasize political programs and grand designs must be encouraged to understand the dialectical relationship between the transformation of subjectivity, the emergence of small primary groups and communities, and the possibilities for largescale social transformation. Such limited perspectives certainly exist in anarchism today, but it must also be recognized that much is being achieved in the ongoing project of pursuing many-sided personal and social liberation.

When Bookchin observes the diverse efforts of primarily young anarchists to create liberatory social alternatives, he dismisses their endeavors as entirely worthless: "all claims to autonomy notwithstanding, this middle-class 'rebel,' with or without a brick in hand, is entirely captive to the subterranean market forces that occupy all the allegedly 'free' terrains of modern social life, from food cooperatives to rural communes." In Bookchin's dogmatic assessment, such activists are not merely influenced by the dominant system but are entirely captive to it. Projects such as cooperatives and

35 Bookchin once had a much more positive if deeply self-contradictory view of affinity groups. In *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* he says that they constituted a "new type of extended family," they "allow for the greatest degree of intimacy," and they are "intensely experimental and variegated in lifestyles [sic]." Nevertheless, he contends in the same work that if they succeed in their revolutionary goals they will "finally disappear into the organic social forms created by the revolution." ["A Note on Affinity Groups" in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism,* 221–222.] He does not explain how "the greatest degree of intimacy" can be attained in the various social forms he proposes for the future, specifically "factory committees," "workers' assemblies," "the neighborhood assembly," and "neighborhood committees, councils and boards." The idea of replacing one's extended family with a factory committee seems a bit disquieting. ["The Forms of Freedom" in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism,* p. 168.]

36 Clark and Martin, *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity,* 168.

Bookchin also tries to associate terrorism within the anarchist movement primarily with individualist currents. He claims that "it was in times of severe social repression and deadening social quiescence that individualist anarchists came to the foreground of libertarian activity — and then primarily as terrorists," and that "those who became terrorists were less often libertarian socialists or communists than desperate men and women who used weapons and explosives to protest the injustices and philistinism of their time, putatively in the name of 'propaganda of the deed.'" Bookchin's understanding of the history of anarchist "terrorism" or propaganda of the deed, as exhibited in such statements, is highly defective.

Many of the most famous figures, such as Ravachol, Vaillant, and Emile Henry, were certainly "social anarchists" (generally anarcho-communists), and not individualists, as were well-known theorists such as Reclus, Kropotkin (at times), Most and Malatesta, who supported their acts or at least refused to condemn them.[26] Ravachol explained his actions as a result of both his "personal need" for vengeance against the bourgeoisie and his desire "to aid the anarchist cause" and "work for the happiness of all people."[27] Far from exemplifying Bookchin's self-indulgent "lifestyle anarchism," Ravachol offers a much better example of self-abnegating "revolutionary asceticism." Indeed, he proclaimed at his trial that he had "made a sacrifice of [his] person" for "the anarchist idea."[28] Vaillant, another well-known propagandist of the deed, described his bombing of the National Assembly in good class-struggle anarchist fashion as "the cry of a whole class which demands its rights and will soon add acts to words."[29] Emile Henry, an intellectually gifted young man, put aside his personal fortunes to commit acts that would, he said, make the "golden calf" of the bourgeoisie "rock violently on its pedestal" until that class was finally overthrown. He proclaimed that his attentats were carried out in the name of "anarchy" with its "egalitarian and libertarian aspirations that strike out against authority."[30] Marshall, one of the most painstaking chroniclers of anarchist history, concludes that "it is quite wrong and anachronistic to call the practitioners of 'propaganda by the deed' at the end of the nineteenth century 'lifestyle anarchists.' They were ... part and product of a social movement which was consciously anarchist and socialist."[31]

A key claim in Bookchin's assessment of individualist anarchism is that it "came to prominence in anarchism precisely to the degree that anarchists lost their connection with a viable public sphere."[32]

26 Bob Black makes a similar case in his critique of Bookchin in *Anarchy After Leftism* (Columbia, MO: C.A.L. Press, 1997), 46–49.

27 George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1962), 309.

28 ibid, 310. Bookchin may have gotten the idea that propaganda of the deed is linked to individualism in part from Woodcock, who incorrectly describes it as "carrying individualism to a Stirnerite extreme." (p. 307) However, Woodcock himself contradicts this diagnosis by saying that the terrorists acted on behalf of "justice, " (which is anathema from a Stirnerite perspective) and he quotes statements of their own that show a commitment to social anarchism. Tuchman adds to the confusion by stating that Ravachol was "almost" an "ego anarchist" but "not quite," in view of his "streak of genuine pity and fellow-feeing for the oppressed." Barbara W. Tuchman, "Anarchism in France," in Irving L. Horowitz, *The Anarchists* (New York : Dell Publishing Co., 1964), 446.

29 Woodcock, *Anarchism*, p. 311.

30 Quoted in Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible,* p. 438.

31 Peter Marshall, personal correspondence.

32 There is some ambiguity in Bookchin's argument here. At some points, as here, he claims that the decline of social anarchism is followed by the rise of individualist or lifestyle anarchism; however, at other times he argues that individualist or lifestyle anarchism is dangerous because it contributes to the decline of social anarchism, which would mean that the rise of the former would precede rather than follow the decline of the latter.

Bookchin's use of the word "precisely" implies that an examination of the historical evidence would clearly show a powerful, indeed a one-to-one correlation between the decline of anarchist mass movements and the rise of individualist anarchism. In effect, he claims to have discovered a law-like regularity in the history of anarchism. It is noteworthy, however, that he makes not even the most cursory attempt to support his claim with historical evidence. His failure to do so is wise on his part, since the empirical evidence shows him to be quite precisely wrong. American individualist anarchism, for example, clearly does not fit into his historical model. Perhaps the most important chapter in the entire history of individualist anarchism took place in the United States between the establishment of Josiah Warren's "Time Store" in the late 1820s and the suspension of publication of Benjamin Tucker's journal *Liberty* about eighty years later. Its emergence and flourishing did not in fact follow the decline of mass anarchist movements. Quite to the contrary, it was during the heyday of individualist anarchism that anarchism as a mass social movement in the United States also saw its most rapid development. The later decline in the fortunes of social anarchism had much to do with the assimilation of radical immigrant groups and then with the growing ascendancy of communism on the left after the Russian Revolution. It had nothing to do with its energy being sapped by rampant individualist bohemianism.[33]

Neither does the history of European anarchism lend support to Bookchin's thesis. Individualist anarchism in Europe has roots in some aspects of thinkers such as de la Boetie, Godwin and Proudhon but developed most under the influence of Stirner and Nietzsche in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and became a particularly prominent current around the turn of the century. Thus, its growth also did not follow any retreat of anarchists from the public sphere, but rather coincided with the spread of socially engaged anarcho-syndicalist and anarcho-communist movements. If Bookchin's thesis had any merit one would expect a significant development of European individualist anarchism to have taken place after the destruction of the Spanish anarchist movement in 1939 and the general decline and relative inactivity of anarchist social movements throughout the 1940s and 1950s; however, a flourishing of individualist anarchism did not take place in that period. Once again, Bookchin's thesis is clearly falsified.

Finally, we might consider the more recent revival of individualist anarchism in the United States. After a decline early in the twentieth century, it reemerged in the 1960s and early 1970s in the form of anarcho-capitalism; however this growth of individualism was not followed by a decline of social anarchism. Rather, it occurred at the same time that social anarchism was having a revival in the United States and elsewhere. Individualist anarchist Murray Rothbard was developing a certain following at the same time that social anarchist Murray Bookchin was. Thus, in case after case, the kind of correlation that Bookchin's thesis would predict simply did not occur.

Lifestyle Anarchism as the New Individualism

We will now examine in more detail some significant aspects of Bookchin's attack on contemporary anarchism. He describes lifestyle anarchism and what he sees as its pernicious effects on contemporary anarchism as follows:

> Today's reactionary social context greatly explains the emergence of a phenomenon in Euro-American anarchism that cannot be ignored: the spread of individualist anarchism. In the traditionally individualist-liberal United States and Britain, the 1990s are awash in self-styled anarchists who — their flamboyant radical rhetoric aside — are cultivating a latter-day anarcho-individualism that I will call lifestyle anarchism. Its preoccupations with the ego and its uniqueness and its polymorphous concepts of resistance are steadily eroding the socialistic character of the libertarian tradition.

Bookchin claims that not only is contemporary anarchism losing its traditional leftist orientation, it is in fact becoming "apolitical" under the influence of the egocentric, reactionary values of the dominant culture:

> Ad hoc adventurism, personal bravura, an aversion to theory oddly akin to the antirational biases of postmodernism,[34] celebrations of theoretical incoherence (pluralism), a basically apolitical and anti-organizational commitment to imagination, desire, and ecstasy, and an intensely self-oriented enchantment of everyday life, reflect the toll that social reaction has taken on Euro-American anarchism over the past two decades.

It was the supposed dominance of such individualist, apolitical, escapist, and self-indulgent qualities among today's anarchists that eventually led Bookchin to disassociate himself from anarchism and conclude that it is a failed project with no promise at this point in history; however, his depiction of contemporary anarchism is not accurate. Not only does he wildly exaggerate its weaknesses, he also overlooks the enormous strengths that have resulted in its importance in the global justice movement, and more generally in movements for the liberation of humanity and the earth.

According to Bookchin, "what passes for anarchism in America and increasingly in Europe is little more than an introspective personalism that denigrates responsible social commitment; an encounter group variously renamed a 'collective' or an 'affinity group'; a state of mind that arrogantly derides structure, organization, and public involvement; and a playground for juvenile antics." He contends, moreover, that the political consequences of these alleged developments have been disastrous. He indicts "the insularity of lifestyle anarchism and its individualistic underpinnings" for "aborting the entry of a potential left-libertarian movement into an ever-contracting public sphere."

If Bookchin had been right in this diagnosis of anarchism in 1995, the past decade would certainly have been a period of extreme quiescence for the movement; however, already by the late 1990s the kind of young anarchists whom he bitterly disparaged were at the forefront of the global justice movement, in effect taking a "left libertarian movement" conspicuously into the center of a significantly expanding global public sphere and dwarfing any impact that Bookchin's "libertarian municipalism" has ever had

33 For a meticulously detailed and quite fascinating study of an immigrant anarchist community, including discussion of the effects of assimilation, see Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City,* 1880–1914 (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

34 Bookchin goes to great lengths lamenting the pernicious influence of postmodern thinkers on contemporary anarchism, and above all that of Nietzsche. For reasons of space, the details of his serious misunderstanding of Nietzsche will not be discussed here. Nietzsche's significance for anarchism is explored at length in John Moore with Spencer Sunshine, eds., *I Am Not A Man, I Am Dynamite: Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004) and outlined in Spencer Sunshine, "Nietzsche and the Anarchists" in *Fifth Estate 367* (Winter 2004–05), 36–37. Bookchin's obliviousness to the nature of postmodernist thought is indicated by his belief that it has an "aversion to theory." In fact, postmodernists are quite preoccupied with theory and especially what they typically refer to as "French Theory."